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SUBJECT Interview with Arturo Cruz

CHARLIE ROSE: This Sunday, Nicaragua's ruling Sandinista junta, led by Daniel Ortega, will hold the country's first election since coming to power in 1979. But not everyone is cheering. In fact, several opposition candidates, including Arturo Cruz, have refused to participate. Mr. Cruz once supported the Sandinistas, serving for a time as Nicaragua's Ambassador to the United States. He is now leader of the Democratic Coordination, a coalition of opposition parties in that Central American nation.

Mr. Cruz, will the election make a difference?

ARTURO CRUZ: Not at all. They will not contribute to solving the crisis, and in fact will compound it.

ROSE: Why is that?

CRUZ: Well, I mean because the elections should be part of a national accord of reconciliation, in a way to reaffirm pluralism in Nicaragua. But since these elections will have, in the first place, hardly any participation of the political spectrum.

ROSE: Why did you refuse to participate?

CRUZ: I did not refuse to participate. I was excluded on purpose by the Sandinistas.

ROSE: Did they make you -- in other words, you totally withdrew -- some people are saying that you withdrew because you didn't feel like the conditions offered you an opportunity to participate. Is that what happened? Or did they simply say,

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"You cannot, Mr. Cruz, run"?

CRUZ: Several thing happened. First of all, they ignore our claim for guarantees.

ROSE: Right.

CRUZ: Second, in practice, I mean it was clearly shown that they would not allow us to have meetings and that there was no freedom of the press for us.

And then, they just made a political game. I mean to make the world believe that they were being flexible, carrying on negotiations with me, but with the idea of not reaching any conclusion and trying to make me look as inflexible, when in fact it was they who were.

ROSE: So, the Sandinistas never wanted an election.

CRUZ: The Sandinistas, first of all, always wanted an election...

ROSE: A free election.

CRUZ: Not a free election, but an election, I mean, with all the advantages for them.

ROSE: How strong is their support in the country?

CRUZ: It's not -- it's a far cry, I mean, what it used to be in 1979, when the whole Nicaraguan people was behind them. Now the deterioration of popular support is immense. And that's why they did not allow me to run, because our alliance constituted a window through which the discontent was being expressed.

ROSE: You could have tapped that discontent.

CRUZ: I not only could, I did. On August 5th in Chinandega, we managed to put thousands of people on a plaza, I mean who were chanting slogans against the Sandinistas that reminded you of the slogans the people cried against Somoza, such as [Spanish expression], "We want them to go," or [Spanish expression], "Where is it that the people want the front to go?" And people were protesting against the militarization of Nicaragua, against the death of the children. And it was interesting to observe how in that crowd there were boys and girls, workers campesinos.

So, they decided at that moment that I should be excluded from the elections.

ROSE: Where did the revolution go wrong for you?

CRUZ: Well, the revolution went wrong for one simple cause. I know that it may sound, perhaps, out of place in some circles in this country. It went wrong because the Sandinistas decided to become communists. And then they departed from the original parameters of the revolution.

ROSE: When did they decide to become communists? When they were in the hills before they overthrew Somoza, or after the fact?

CRUZ: That's an interesting question. Even if my answer, it's an admission that I was taken for a ride, I mean, or that I was too optimistic, hoping for a social democracy.

The Sandinistas, now that we look at it from hindsight, and there is abundant literature, decided to become communists the same day they founded the party in 1961.

ROSE: The same day they founded the party.

CRUZ: That's right.

ROSE: So they always intended to have a Marxist-Leninist state.

What should the United States do? Because we have talked about the Contadora process. Then when the Sandinistas say they're willing to accept the Contadora process, we pull back from it.

CRUZ: Well, I am not an apologist if the United States policy. I do not intend to be that. But for fairness, for the sake of fairness, the United States, as well as the other four Central American countries, refused to accept the amended act of Contadora because the way it is, it favors the Sandinistas regarding the reduction of armaments and it postpones, I mean, the democratization of our country.

ROSE: Is the Reagan policy with respect to Nicaragua the appropriate and wise policy, in your judgment?

CRUZ: In my judgment, it is not. But you have to admit, however, that now it's a foregone conclusion. The United States should have never, in my judgment, supported military action against the Nicaraguan government.

ROSE: Should never have supported, or covertly or otherwise, Contras trying to overthrow the Sandinistas, or put pressure on them.

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CRUZ: Right, covertly or overtly. But there should have been a military support and economic support to the Hondurans and the Costa Ricans, and of course maintained the support for the Salvadoran government.

ROSE: Thank you very much, Arturo Cruz.

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ROSE: Here are you -- this is you, September 23rd, 1984, Arturo Cruz. What's happening?

CRUZ: Well, I mean, that's a demonstration of what I call Sandinista communist Ku Klux Klan, Brown Shirt, 1984 version. That is a revenge, I mean, for the rally that we have held in Chinandega. We were meeting just a few people there. So the Sandinistas decided to send a mob against us in a proportion of 25-to-1, in order to retaliate for what had taken place in previous rallies where the people demonstrated their dislike with the government; second, to terrorize our followers; and to discredit me, of course.

ROSE: And do you think the Sandinistas fear you?

CRUZ: Well, in this regard: In a free elections, they knew that I was going, with the Coradinoro (?), to be, as I indicated to you earlier, an outlet for the people to express their discontent.

ROSE: And the people that want to express their discontent is more than a majority of the people in Nicaragua?

CRUZ: Then, because of the lack of polls...

ROSE: You don't know.

CRUZ: You don't know. But it's very, very, very large. I mean it's immense. I have felt it. I have talked to campesinos, I have talked to urban workers, middle-class professionals, and there is a pervading disillusionment.

ROSE: Is it because of Sandinista economic policies or because of the suppression of freedom, in terms of free press and other ways?

CRUZ: I would say it's a combination of everything. The largest polarization is among the campesinos and among the well-to-do. Ironically, it is the campesino children who are dying in the war and it's the campesino who are subjected to all sorts of coercion through grass-roots organizations. It is they who have to suffer the shortage of food. And also, when they try

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to sell in the free market part of their own crops, I mean they are subjected to all kinds of government regulations. So you have tremendous polarization there.

And then, of course, in the well-to-do because they are unhappy with the way things are going.

ROSE: Do you ever expect to see the Sandinistas overthrown, either in an election or by armed force?

CRUZ: No, I do not expect that, and I am not working for that?

ROSE: What are you working for, then?

CRUZ: I am working for the Sandinistas to rectify, to realize that unless they decide to change the course towards democratization, to change...

ROSE: Do you think that's realistic, when you look at the experience of Marxist revolutions across the world?

CRUZ: That's a good comment. I mean I know that it's not very realistic. But I hope, I mean, that they would realize that they are Nicaraguans more than communists. I mean they should be a Nicaraguan first. And I still hope they can do it.

ROSE: But you clearly come down on the side of suggesting that the Administration support of the Contras is a futile policy.

CRUZ: Yes. And I think it should be suppressed, however, as part of an overall solution in which the Sandinistas should also play their part. You see, the way...

ROSE: How, then, should this government pressure the Sandinistas, to appeal to their nationalism rather than their political ideology?

CRUZ: I think it should be political and economic...

ROSE: Sanctions.

CRUZ: ...sanctions.

ROSE: Quarantine?

CRUZ: Well, I don't want to engage, I mean, in making suggestions of what should be done. But I would agree with that kind of sanctions now. But the military solution now has to be part of a whole deal.

ROSE: Arturo Cruz. He is the leader of the Democratic Coordinator Alliance. That is a coalition of opposition parties. He was with the Sandinistas. He left them because of a significant disagreement with the direction they were taking the country that he lived in and loved.